



Reframing Our Thinking and Getting to Know the Child

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Supporting any individual with an autism spectrum disorder should be a team effort. One person cannot do it alone. The team should consist of many individuals from school and home working together. Everyone has a different relationship with the individual and can add different perspectives and ideas. There is no one right way to do this. Open minds and communication are some of the best tools to bring to each meeting.

One way to begin supporting someone is to get to know who he or she is, and to understand his or her strong points. Many times when teams meet, challenges or deficits are very clear to everyone. However, not enough time is spent looking at the positive aspects of the individual. It can be very useful to see each individual as a whole person and not just focus on the challenging aspects. Each individual has positive aspects that can be utilized in their education and life. As a team, there are two lists to create. The first list should be about the student's strengths, preferences and interests. The second list should include fearful or frustrating situations. Each team member should contribute what he or she is able. The list will grow and change as the student changes.

STRENGTHS	INTERESTS	PREFERENCES
Is cute. Can talk, ask, and answer questions, and express feelings. Can wait and be patient. Can be quiet. Can follow routines. Sits in his seat. Can work independently. Listens...responds to adults. Looks at speaker. Imitates. Reads. Writes/draws. Counts. Takes turns.	Books about dogs. Trains. Computer games. Turtles. Puppies: Dalmatians. Listening to stories. Pokemon® Cartoons: Bugs Bunny. Movies: 101 Dalmatians, Lady and the Tramp, Dog Films. TV: Lassie.	To be engaged in Meaningful activities. Direct questions or instructions for activity. To be 'right' or do things correctly. To know exactly what to do: work/rules. Loud computer sounds. To know and follow the rules.

Can use the computer. Occupies himself. Can be redirected. Can follow rules. Talks with peers/enjoys this. Says thank you; asks for help. Tolerates closeness of others. Is quiet when he is engaged in meaningful activity.		
FEARS AND FRUSTRATIONS		
Unclear limits or expectations. Tasks that are uninteresting or meaningless to him. Lack of appropriate warning for transitions; sudden transitions. Not enough time to process information; too much verbal information too fast, constant questions. Not being able to move. Losing a game. Coordinating all of his senses to follow the rules: processing information, remembering, raising his hand to talk before he can speak, waiting etc... Loud noises, babies crying. Not finishing an activity. Being touched.		

These lists can provide guidance in how to engage the student in academic activities. For example, if the student is interested in trains, she/he can read about trains, do math involving trains, draw trains, sing songs about trains, or play games involving trains. The interest areas can be built into many activities and will help her/him stay focused and engaged. Temple Grandin often says that we should take the 'interest areas and broaden them out'.

Look at the day to see what the balance may be between the two lists. Is she/he engaged in more fearful or frustrating activities or are her/his strengths, interests, and preferences worked into the day to bolster the areas that need improvement? If there are more fearful or frustrating engagements, behaviors may reflect those feelings. Try to incorporate as many strengths, interests, and preferences into the day and use them to teach skills that may be needed in the future.

There are two additional lists that would be useful for the team to create in order to get a more complete picture of the student. These lists address areas needing more support and learning, and learning styles and strategies. Once again, if the team spends time in a meeting creating these lists, it will become clearer to everyone what the priorities are for the student. They would reflect ideas from both home and school should be incorporated into the Individualized Education Program (IEP). For example:

AREAS NEEDING MORE SUPPORT AND LEARNING	
Making friends	Playing a game/Winning and losing
Entering a conversation	Waiting
Asking for help	Handwriting
LEARNING STYLES AND STRATEGIES	
Build on his love and skill in reading.	
Acknowledge his preferences for rules and order.	
Visual schedules to rehearse changes in daily routine.	

Once you have completed the first four lists, it is time to use that information to create learning situations for the student. The Lists can become integral aspects of the planning and implementation of activities that can enhance the student's learning.

First, establish goals and objectives that are important for the student. It may be wise to begin thinking 'long term' when choosing goals, objectives, or activities. For example, being able to sit and work for 15-30 minutes can be a school related and, ultimately, a work related skill. Remember that many of the important goals for the child will not be academic!!!

IMPORTANT GOALS FOR THIS CHILD
Sitting for extended periods of time while working or playing with peer.
Having short conversations with peers about a shared interest.
Waiting quietly alone or with a group for an activity or event to begin.
Writing name and address clearly.

Next, look at the list of strengths, interests and preferences to see if anything from the list can be used to help the student work toward his or her goals. Using the student's strengths, interests, and preferences to support his or her learning will increase the motivation to learn. The best way to gain skills is to make the activity interesting and meaningful by utilizing the activities the student enjoys. Everyone is more motivated to work when the task is meaningful to him or her! If it is boring or dull, it is less inviting to do the work.

USING STRENGTHS, INTERESTS, AND PREFERENCES IN LEARNING

Sit with peers (who shares interest) to read books about dogs, trains, or Bugs Bunny.

Write a story about dogs, bugs, or another interest area (this builds on handwriting in general).

When waiting, give student a book, dog cards, or audiotape to use.

Have the student explain computer games to peers (with supervision) and play it with them.

Along with inserting strengths, interests and preferences into the curriculum, create ways to decrease the fears and frustrations of the student. If anxiety, confusion, and stress can be reduced, it will be easier to learn. As fears are reduced and activities become more interesting, skills will be gained.

REDUCING FEARS AND FRUSTRATIONS

Use visual schedule to introduce the day and warn for transitions.

Be exact with number of repetitions for activities, turns to take in a game, or time to spend on an activity. Use a timer if necessary or visual support.

Build in time for him to move by having him help with the room setup, running errands, etc.

Incorporate interests into activities; including counting dogs, and reading stories about trains.

Build in time to process information. Don't rush him. Incorporate reading his schedule throughout the day to help him understand and transition.

Finally, as a team discuss what instructional strategies work best. This may include examining the physical setting. Does the student need a specific work seat that is free from distractions?

Think about noise, visual distraction, smells, or the temperature issues that may be challenging.

Next think about instructional issues. Does the student work best with cues? How does written work need to be adapted? How close should an assistant be while working? Once again, this list can be modified as time passes to maintain a current listing of strategies that everyone might utilize.

INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGIES

Give him a specific workspace in all areas.

Use written instructions along with verbal reminders to help him process, however keep verbal to a minimum as it confuses him.

Incorporate interest areas to keep him on task.

Be very clear and specific with instructions. Clarify how many or how long he will work on a task.

Warn for transitions using a schedule.

This method of getting to know an individual and working as a team can help alleviate some of the stress for everyone involved. Teamwork can be challenging in itself, but if the team remembers that the meeting and lists are about the individual with autism and not about personal egos, progress can be achieved. Truly listening to one another and knowing that each team member has information that is valuable to share is crucial. Success is great positive reinforcement for everyone and can happen by reframing our thinking about meetings as well as about each individual with an autism spectrum disorder.

[CLICK HERE FOR WORKSHEET](#)

Davis, K. (2003). Reframing our thinking and getting to know the child. *The Reporter*, 8(3), 22-27.